

**Trade
Unions
and
The War**

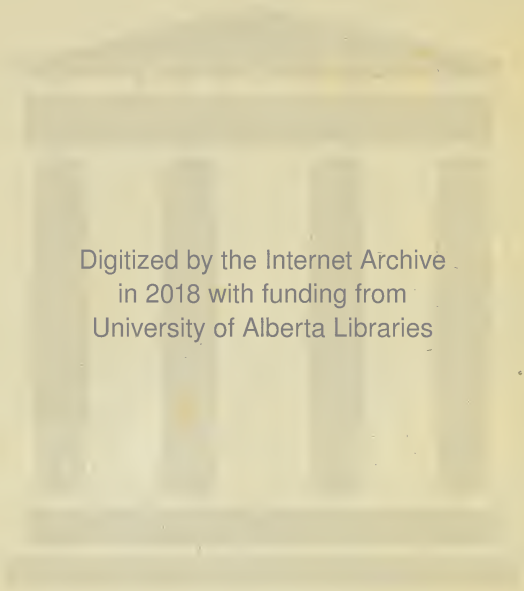
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**The Policy of the
Communist Party**

ONE PENNY



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TRADE UNIONS
AND THE WAR

COMMUNIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN
16 KING STREET, LONDON, W.C.2

Issued by the Communist Party of Great Britain, 16 King Street,
London, W.C.2, and printed by the Marston Printing Co.
(*T.U. all depts.*), Cayton Place, Cayton Street, London, E.C.1.
25,000—19/1/40.

INTRODUCTION

“ I don't mean to imply that there must be no increase of wages, but I do say that it would be a mistake to tie up wages to the cost of living, which in the end could benefit no one, because it could only give a violent impetus to the vicious spiral of alternately rising prices.”

(NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN, January 9, 1940.)

The fact that nearly three million workers are pressing for wage advances shows that their views have little in common with those of the Government. Since the war the cost of living has risen by $2/3\frac{1}{2}$ d. in the pound (even as the basis of the Government's own figure), and the working class is certainly not going to submit to this indirect robbery lying down. A great mass movement is now developing.

But the issue before the workers is even more serious than that declared intention of the Government that wages shall not be allowed to climb up after prices. There are plans afoot for a wholesale attack on the standard of living, for cutting wages even below their present level.

The Trade Union movement is facing a major crisis on wages.

Leading articles in weighty journals have proclaimed that the greatest problem before the country is the working out of a “comprehensive policy” on wages and have called on the workers to face “stern trials and sacrifices.” What does it all mean?

So far the General Council of the Trades Union Congress has not taken steps to inform the workers of the gravity of the situation. It has negotiated with Sir

John Simon on wages, but in an atmosphere of secrecy.

This resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party on Trade Union Policy and War puts the issues plainly before the movement. It puts forward a considered and practical policy for trade unionists, and the measures advocated are based on the recognition of the fact that a strong and united fight has got to be carried on against the Government and the employing class. The very nature of the war makes this vitally necessary. As the resolution points out :

“ This war is not a people’s war, but a war in the interests of the big capitalists against the interests of the people. The Government and the big employers are determined to place the costs and burdens of the war on the shoulders of the working people.”

All that has happened since the passing of this resolution bears out the accuracy of its analysis. The great conspiracy against wages becomes clearer every day and can now be pieced together :—

applications for wage increases in the separate industries will either be rejected out of hand or answered with minor concessions;

the family allowance system will be introduced as a means of causing division amongst the workers and fixing a much lower basic rate (35/- is spoken of as a possible basic rate for single men);

compulsory saving by means of deduction from the pay packet will be a means of getting what the Government cannot obtain by means of direct wage cuts;

a direct tax on wages will carve off another large

slice of working-class expenditure on necessities and divert it into war expenditure.

These sacrifices from the workers are sometimes demanded in the name of patriotism, sometimes they are put forward as being in the workers' own interests! It is argued that if wages go up, then prices will go up still further. In other words, although prices have already gone up, the workers are expected to submit to this indirect cut in wages in the hope that the capitalists will not raise prices again. This argument is a capitalist method of threatening the working class; the workers are being told that if they get wage increases the gains will be cancelled out by higher prices.

So long as this war goes on things are going to get worse for the working people. The war demands a huge expenditure, £4,000 every minute; production is diverted into armaments, goods which the people need are not produced and not imported. And then alongside the direct military expenditure there rages an economic war between the belligerent Powers. Both sides are fighting for markets and cutting costs for that purpose.

But at the same time as wealth is destroyed and the people get less and less, the big capitalist sharks are gobbling up all they can. War profiteering on an immense scale has already begun. The "haves" intend to stick to what they have got. The quarter of a million people who own property valued at £9,000 million are screaming at the very thought of having to pay for the war that they themselves brought about. The capitalists have made up their minds that they are not going to pay for the war. They are out to make the workers pay and all of the burdens will certainly

fall on them unless they succeed in unitedly fighting these attacks and bringing the war to an end.

And in this great fight that is now beginning, the working class will have to think and act as never before. They will have to defend their present organisations against attack and disruption so that they can be effectively used in the fight. They will have to resort to new methods of struggle and forms of organisation.

France has already shown to what lengths the capitalists will go even in so-called democratic countries. There workers have been militarised in many industries, a working week of 66 hours is not uncommon, all men not of military age have to submit to a flat levy of 15 per cent of their earnings, a deduction of 40 per cent is made in the pay of all working hours above 40, shop stewards have been abolished.

It is in the light of these facts that this Resolution of the Communist Party deals with the necessity of creating a powerful organisation in order to carry through the policy it puts forward. Strengthen the trade unions, make them democratic, organise the unorganised. Above all, as the resolution points out, the foundation of the workers' strength lies in the power of the factory organisation. Shop stewards and factory committees. This is the way to unite the workers in the factory, to provide links between one factory and another and to stimulate the activities of the trade unions.

We ask the active workers in the trade unions and factories carefully to consider this Resolution and to discuss its proposals which are put forward at the most critical moment in the history of trade unionism in this country.

THE TRADE UNIONS AND THE WAR

(Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party)

The War has already clearly shown that the employers in Britain have only one thought—to lose no time in amassing great new fortunes out of the war and to increase their power at the expense of the people, much as they did in the last war.

This war is not a people's war, but a war in the interests of the big capitalists against the interests of the people.

The Government and the big employers are determined to place the costs and burdens of the war on the shoulders of the working people.

The Employers' Offensive

The employers and the Government have already in one way or another attacked the standard of living and the working conditions of millions of working people.

Every housewife knows that the officially recorded increase of 10 points in the cost of living during the first month of the war did not represent anything like the real rise in prices. New increases in the price of foodstuffs are taking place each week. What wage increases have been won so far do not meet this situation. All this means that millions of working-class people have suffered serious wage-cuts.

Rights and conditions won by the workers in the past and held for generations by the strength of Trade Union organisation are now being attacked.

The working day is being lengthened by the introduction of unrestricted overtime, whilst at the same time hundreds of thousands of other workers have been dismissed or put on short time.

In the building industry large numbers of skilled workers employed by Municipal Authorities have been dismissed, and an attempt has been made to re-employ them at the National Service flat rate of £3 per week—a sum which spells a big wage cut.

Dismissals on a large scale have been the order of the day in the printing trade, in road transport and other occupations.

The Government's scheme for organising mobile armies of dockers, compulsory training for the unemployed, and the forced restriction of workers to their present jobs by the Control of Employment Act, are all serious and dangerous steps towards complete militarisation of labour.

Side by side with these sweeping attacks on the workers in industry and the gross and outrageous profiteering, the Government treats the Old Age Pensioners and the Unemployed with callous indifference and refuses to make any improvement in their unfortunate lot. Truly it is a profiteers' war. The British working class cannot and will not allow this scandalous and intolerable situation to continue.

The Industrial Truce

The success of the employers' attack has only been possible because of the deliberate policy pursued by the leadership of the Trades Union Congress.

Just as the Labour Party leadership has proclaimed a truce in the political field and lined up with the Government and the capitalist parties, so the trade

union leaders have lined up with the Government and big employers.

In pursuit of this reactionary policy, the T.U.C. leadership has been prepared to support the action of the Government and the employers, to surrender conditions of vital importance, and to postpone elections within the workers' organisations themselves for the duration of the war.

The Labour leaders have been given subordinate places in monopoly capitalism's war machine, serving on Government advisory committees of all kinds. They serve the purpose of camouflaging the real character of the war and become the watchdogs of monopoly capitalism on the Labour movement.

New Attacks Preparing

This policy has, however, provoked a sharp response from the working class. The workers in practically all industries are forcing their unions to demand wage increases. Although the increases are as yet grossly inadequate, the whole attitude of the organised working class shows that they will resist any attempt to reduce their standard of life.

The Government and the employers are therefore discussing ways and means of extending the present industrial truce, so as to effectively prevent the workers from maintaining or improving their standard of life in war-time.

Suggestions are being made that wages shall not rise with the increase in the cost of living. The Government of the monopoly capitalists also aim at putting an increasingly heavy share of the cost of the war on the shoulders of the workers by a tax on wages (deducted by the employers in the factories) and by a tax on all purchases of goods in the shops.

An alternative suggestion is being mooted of only increasing the wages of workers with dependent children up to the level of the increased cost of living, while the wages of other workers are increased in less proportion, if at all.

Still further proposals are now being put forward, as by the economist Keynes in *The Times* to impose a compulsory levy on wages so that all wages above 35/- a week minimum will be reduced.

The Chamberlain Government would then seek to enforce any industrial truce arrangement that was arrived at by legislation, or by emergency decree.

End the Industrial Truce

It is urgently necessary for all trade unionists and workers in industry to end at once the industrial truce and take up active struggle for their interests.

If this industrial truce policy were to succeed, then the British workers, the pioneers of Trade Unionism, are faced with the danger of losing all their safeguards and having virtual slavery thrust on them. They would be doomed to the very fate which they have protested against in fascist countries, and the gains of generations of sacrifice and struggle will have vanished.

There can be no standstill in the rapidly changing conditions of war-time. If the Unions do not fight to win new positions, they will be thrown back and lose the positions they are in now. To stand still is to court disaster.

In this situation the Communist Party puts forward a policy for workshop and trade union action—a general policy of advance for all workers.

The Policy of Industrial Advance

Fight for Higher Wages : Build Workers' Unity

In face of the general rise in prices, the unions must develop the struggle for higher wages not only in those industries where no wage advances have been given, but in those where the advance has been inadequate.

Short-term agreements, liable to revision every quarter, should be the rule.

Wage increases should in all cases be on the basic time rate, with consequential increases in piece rates. The system of war bonuses should be opposed.

The unions desiring wage increases should be encouraged to co-ordinate their forces with a view to exerting the maximum pressure on employers and Government.

Resist the Extension of the Working Day

A strenuous resistance must be made to all attempts to lengthen the working day.

As a step towards the abolition of overtime, we must fight for the enforcement of trade union regulations with regard to the control of overtime, and against any relaxation of the Factory Acts.

Increase Unemployment Benefits : Drive to End Unemployment

An immediate increase of unemployment benefit and U.A.B. scales to compensate for the increased cost of living.

Resumption and expansion of house building and other socially useful work in order to absorb the unemployed.

Trade Union Control of Dismissals and Discipline

The Trade Union Movement must demand an end to the system of arbitrary dismissals—whether mass or individual. It should fight to establish a right of appeal for all workers who are individually dismissed. The worker to remain in employment pending the hearing of the appeal, at which he should be represented by his union.

No mass dismissals on account of lack of work or any other reason should be permitted, without prior consultation with the Trade Union Movement.

Safeguard the Health of the Workers : Improved Welfare Organisation

The health and working conditions of the workers in industry must be maintained and improved. The worsening of working conditions as a result of the black-out must not be tolerated. The new Factory Act contains provisions that can be fully enforced. Welfare organisations should not be left in the hands of the employers or their toadies, but should be controlled by the Shop Stewards, who should ensure proper canteens, first aid and ambulance equipment, clubs and sports and educational facilities.

The question of workers' travel facilities to work should be taken up as a question of the utmost importance.

Women and Youth

Women and youth must be fully protected and, in particular, safeguarded against long hours which interfere with their leisure and week-end recreation. Where women or young people are put on to work previously done by adult male labour, they should

receive the rate of wages that previously operated on the job. Adequate training in the employers' time must be given to the younger generation, on whom rests the future skill and well-being of the working class.

Adequate Air Raid Protection

The Civil Defence Act provides the basis for a minimum of Air Raid protection in every factory and on every job employing more than 50 workpeople. This should be enforced, and every effort made to get 100 per cent protection. The shop stewards demand the right to control all A.R.P. schemes and ensure that workers engaged on A.R.P. are properly paid, equipped and protected.

These Demands Can Be Won

The power to win these demands exists. This power is in the factories, trade unions, labour exchange queues, and workers' homes. It is time to develop the will to use that power.

What is necessary above everything else is united action in the workshops, pits, trade union branches and district committees, and trades councils. Once this power is developed there is nothing which can either destroy or even halt it.

Every worker in industry can play his or her part. We can press forward in the trade unions and the factories our demands and end the industrial truce and passivity within the movement.

Already some of the most powerful battalions of Labour are on the move.

The engineers—key men in the present situation—are pressing forward with their demand for a 10/- weekly increase.

In the coalfields, the miners, discontented and refusing to be fobbed off with the measly increase of 8d. a shift, are more and more talking of tabling a demand for a 2/- increase.

Thousands of railwaymen, too, are expressing their dissatisfaction with the recent small awards of the Railway Wages Tribunal and are declaring their readiness to fight for an increase of 10/- on their present weekly wage.

In the factories and industrial plants throughout the country, widespread feelings of revolt are rife against the burdens the employers are putting on the workers. The blackout conditions and heavily curtailed transport facilities are adding two or three hours on their working day. The young workers in industry are full of fighting spirit and are making a stand against their grievances.

Women workers in the factories are also showing splendid signs of militancy and are entering the trade unions in record numbers.

A great new movement is beginning to take shape in the factories. The workers are refusing to be speeded up continuously and are fighting back against the attempts of the employers to take advantage of the war to increase the exploitation of the workers.

Their successful stand is teaching the workers the value of augmenting their trade union strength by organised factory action.

There are unmistakable signs of rising militancy.

Build Strong Factory Committees

In every factory the very foundation of our success lies in the strength of the factory organisation. Not

only are shop stewards needed for every trade, but shop committees of shop stewards in the factory to present the united demands of all sections, to the common enemy.

Every trade and department in a workshop must be represented on a factory committee, which represents the united force of the workers against the management.

The factory committees should stimulate the workers to attend their trade union branches and to see that militants are elected to all trade union elective bodies.

At the same time, it is necessary to establish co-operation between all the factories in a given district.

Organise the Unorganised

Two-thirds of the workers in Britain are outside trade unions. Large industries and occupations are unorganised. The unions must be brought together to organise an intensive recruitment campaign.

Preserve Trade Union Democracy

All devices for suspending meetings of elected trade union bodies and postponing trade union elections for the duration of the war must be scrapped. The democratic organs of the working class must function freely.

Extend Working-Class Education

In the last war, the best fighters for working-class interests, and the most successful organisers in the factories were those class-conscious trade unionists who studied Socialist literature and participated in Socialist education classes, and helped the workers

around them to stand firm by their class outlook and not be deceived by the propaganda put out by the Government and the employers. In this war, it is even more vital for every active trade unionist to study Marxist literature, to get an understanding of Socialism, and to carry this knowledge and this inspiration to the workers round him.

Such a trade union policy can contribute to the building up of a mighty and irresistible movement of the British working class. This movement can end the present imperialist war and sweep away the power of its capitalist enemies who have so meanly and ruthlessly exploited its great wealth-producing power in their own selfish interests. It can sweep away for ever the whole corrupt capitalist system which for so long, with the help of false working-class leaders, has kept the British people fettered in chains. It can open the road to the fullness of a Socialist life in Britain in which, for the first time, the noblest aspirations of the British people can have full rein.

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Please send me particulars

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